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24 August 1983

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Syrian Involvement in the Shuf

1. The Syrians are most likely to continue to play an indirect role in the Shuf following an Israeli withdrawal. We believe they will continue to provide logistical support and weapons to the Druze. In the event of Druze losses to the Christian Lebanese Forces, Damascus probably would order Syrian Army shelling of Christian areas and could commit Syrian "volunteers"--possibly Defense Companies troops in mufti--to the fighting. An open deployment of regular Syrian units, risking an Israeli response, would be less likely--unless Syrian allies were being decimated by the Maronites and Damascus concluded its credibility was at stake. [REDACTED]

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2. President Assad's response to the current US diplomatic initiative suggests no flexibility in the Syrian position. In his meeting with Ambassador McFarlane on 7 August, Assad rejected McFarlane's contention that the Israeli withdrawal from Alayh and the Shuf could be used to benefit Lebanon. Assad argued that the government in Beirut represents only the Phalange Party and that the Druze would fight any attempt to impose Phalange control, concluding that the only solution is to achieve a "comprehensive national reconciliation." [REDACTED]

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3. We believe further diplomatic initiatives almost certainly will fail to move Damascus away from support of the Druze. Assad would rebuff a direct request from the Gemayel government, and a public statement from Beirut on the Syrian role would almost certainly elicit Syrian charges in response that the existing government does not represent the will of the Lebanese people. Damascus would ignore any Arab pressures, knowing that the Arab moderates are unlikely to risk an open break with Syria. Assad has demonstrated a willingness to act independently of Moscow--on the issue of the Fatah rebellion, for example--and would probably disregard a Soviet request for restraint, in the unlikely event that Moscow would raise the issue with Assad. [REDACTED]

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4. We believe Syria's indirect tactics work against the deterrent value of military steps to head off Syrian involvement in the Shuf. Deployment of the MNF to positions adjacent to Syrian lines would fail to prevent Syrian material assistance to

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the Druze and would almost certainly prompt Syrian charges of US collusion in imposing Phalange dominance on Lebanon. An attempt to employ US military forces to signal US resolve might deter overt Syrian military deployment to the Shuf but would only increase covert Syrian pressure on the Gemayel government as well as open Syrian moves to bolster the National Salvation Front as a legitimate alternative. [REDACTED]

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